A Review of theories and evidence of inclusive growth: an economic perspective for Africa

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Abstract

Although the concept of inclusive economic growth is relatively nascent, more than ever, it is deemed very relevant to Africa. Contrary to the traditional concept of pro-poor growth, which more or less places those at the lower end of the income/wealth distribution spectrum at the margin of the processes of wealth creation, the concept of inclusive growth suggests a more active participation of the poor. An appealing sub-concept proposes two pillars – labour absorbing growth and increasing productivity of those who are being employed. Although perhaps the full conceptualization and modeling framework is still to see light, some work has been done to attempt to understand how inclusive the recent surge of growth in Africa might have been. This paper explores the literature of inclusive growth in the African context, from a socio-economic stand point. It attempts to establish the characterizations of inclusive growth in Africa, its underlying arguments and prospects for future theoretical and empirical development.

Keywords: inclusive growth, labour absorbing growth, productivity, inequality, poverty, social opportunity, Africa

1. Introduction

Inclusive growth has become the driving paradigm of current poverty reduction discourses. The quest for inclusive growth comes amidst realization that growth, before poverty-reduction, or focus on post-growth redistribution is not an optimal and sustainable poverty reduction strategy [1]. The precursory ideas to the current concept of inclusivity, such as inclusive neo-liberalism [2]; [3] and social cohesion [4], feature in development literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the set of thinking that can now be classified under the concepts of inclusive economic growth only emerged in late 2000s and 2010 going forward.

Rapid economic growth in developing countries over the last three decades has been the basis of substantial decline in absolute poverty [5]. In Africa, the general neo-liberal thoughts that dominated the world in the 80s and 90s became the driving economic development dogma through the Washington-consensus-led structural adjustment programs. This approach led to economic crises and stagnation in Africa, from where the entrenched poverty of the last two decades had its origin [6]; [7]; [8].

Though growth may be good for the poor [9], high economic growth[1] has not translated into poverty reduction at commensurate rate, despite marked improvements in Sub-Saharan Africa's (SSA) human development indicators[2] [10]. The World Bank [11] identifies persistently high inequality as the underlying reason for the slow pace of poverty reduction and hence non-inclusivity of the recent growth. This paper explores the different conceptualisations with emphases on those that are relevant to the African continent.

2. Conceptualization of inclusive economic growth

Born from the debate around sustainable poverty reduction[12], inclusive economic growth has seen different conceptualizations [13]. As early as 2000, the term *inclusive* was in use to characterize pro-poor growth as participatory growth [14]. In this respect, pro-poor growth is the immediate predecessor of the current thinking on inclusive growth. Pro-poor growth has two main sub-concepts: the relative and the absolute. Kakwani and Pernia [14] on the one hand lay emphasis on the relative concept, in which the incomes of the poor is expected to grow faster than those of the non-poor, or of average income (in the weak sense). Ravallion [15] on the other hand suggests the absolute notion that requires only an improvement in the absolute incomes of the poor, as the economy grows, irrespective of changes in inequality. However, while pro-poor growth concerns itself only with the behavior of those whose welfare fall below the poverty line, inclusive growth is rather more general, encompassing everyone in the entire welfare distribution[13].

Although the concepts of inclusive growth and pro-poor growth are distinct, there is a great deal of overlap when one considers the conception of Kakwani and Pernia [14] where inclusivity is implied in their definition of the 'pro-poorness' of growth. However, whereas economic growth, even if accompanied by rising inequality, can still bring about absolute improvements in the

[1] In the last decade, African economies have shown sustained economic growth. On average, African economies took a significant positive turn in the early 2000s growing at above 5% per annum compared to barely 2% in the previous decades,
[2] Up to 70% primary enrolment rates in 2010, 60% adult literacy, falling child mortality from 175/1000 to 125/1000 between 1990 and 2010 [44].

incomes of the poor, falling inequality in a contracting economy, though pro-poor in the relative sense, does not necessarily bring about an absolute benefit for the poor[3] [15],[16]. The distinctiveness of pro-poor growth is its emphasis on growth, instead of putting the poor at the center of the growth process. In addition, pro-poor growth analytics focus on growth and poverty analyses ex-post [17].

With increasing weight being given to inclusive growth in development debates, focus has shifted from inequality of outcomes (reminiscent of the growth, then redistribution approach), to inequality of assets and opportunities as input to wealth creation [18], [13], [12]. In a neat exposé along this light, Stuart [12] concludes with a call for redistribution[4], broadly defined beyond outcomes to include social opportunities with emphasis on participation in the economic process.

The debate around inclusive growth emerged, and has been led largely by public and policy debates in emerging countries [1]. Multilateral international and regional organisations, including NGOs have played a key role in promoting the concept [19], [20], including the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other non-aligned views. These approaches are briefly reviewed below.

2.1. The World Bank Approach

The WB approach requires growth to be rapidly paced, broad-based across all economic sectors and inclusive of a large part of a country's labour force [21]. The approach links the macro and micro determinants of economic growth. It is consistent with the findings of the Commission on Growth and Development [22], in which inclusiveness - embracing the equity, equality of opportunity and social protection – compliment a successful growth strategy. Another pillar of this approach is the fact that inclusive growth assumes a long-term perspective once emphasis is placed on productive employment as opposed to short-term income redistribution[5]. The WB concept is congruent with the absolute definition of pro-poor growth. The approach follows the ex-ante growth-diagnostic [23] to analyse the sources of sustained high growth and its constraints. The aim of such analysis is to propose ways of raising the pace of growth through a more optimal use of labour, especially those trapped in low-productivity sectors and those totally excluded from the growth-generating process. In this sense, inclusive growth is characterized by a labour-absorbing growth, and increasing productivity of those already employed.

2.2. The Asian Development Bank Approach

The ADB approach is more encompassing [24]; [25]. Besides the element of broad participation in, and contribution to the growth process characterizing inclusive growth, it emphasizes gender, ethnicity and race. The ADB [26] reiterates this broad concept of inclusivity in defining inclusive growth as accompanied by equality of opportunity. The concept of ADB goes ahead to embrace

[3] Any absolute benefits to the poor can only arise if the falling inequality is as a results of a progressive pro-poor tax
[4] Accompanied by progressive taxation, macroeconomic prudence with moderate inflation, debt, deficits and counter-cyclical policies, while protecting pro-poor-spending; creating a policy environment that is conducive for pro-poor investment mainly of domestically owned labour-intensive SMEs (11 p. 32),
[5] The approach however recognizes that short term distribution schemes can serve as safety nets for the poor while growth policies are taking a while to yield fruits.

an environmentally sustainable growth ([26] p. 4) as a determining factor of inclusive growth. This all-embracing approach, though holistic, makes inclusive growth analytics untenable given that one has to assess in what ways everyone participated in such growth. In contrast to the WB, the ADB concept rests more on relative pro-poorness of growth. This contrast is well expressed as follows: […] *if inequality in the overall distribution falls with growth, this would have some claim to be labelled [as] "inclusive growth"…if there is growth and an increase in inequality, then we could have the case that poverty falls because the growth effect dominates the inequality effect. In this case growth is "pro-poor", in the sense that poverty has fallen; but it is not "inclusive", in the sense that inequality has risen* ([25] p.7).

2.3. The OECD Approach

The OECD's approach to inclusive growth as outlined in [18] rests on three broad foundations – multidimensionality, distributional considerations and policy impact. The multidimensionality pillar suggests moving beyond GDP-based measures of growth and GDP per capita-based measures of the associated welfare, to embrace other important dimensions of people's wellbeing that allow them to productively participate in the economy and society, including social relations and satisfaction. The distributional pillar also requires analyses of distribution to go beyond (per capita) income to consider the distributions of the multidimensional wellbeing.

The call for a multidimensional approach to inclusive growth stems from the recognition of a high heterogeneity in the correlation between GDP per capita growth and multidimensional living standards. OECD ([20] p. 87) show that only 38% of the cross-sectional variability in multidimensional living standard is explained by per capita GDP growth. At the root of this heterogeneity are structural factors such as fiscal policies and the role of the public and the private sectors. This explains the emphases the OECD approach lays on policy impact analyses relating to both growth and distribution of multidimensional wellbeing and opportunities that matter for inclusive economic participation [20][27][18].

2.4. The African Development Bank Approach

The AfDB's increasing concern with inclusive growth came to light when it outlined its long-term strategy with inclusive growth at the centre [28]. This came amidst the awareness that despite robust economic growth, Africa has become increasingly unequal, accounting for six of the world's ten most unequal countries. Its approach to inclusive growth is based on the consensus that rapid, sustainable economic growth in Africa must also be equitable for sustained poverty reduction [12]([28] p. 2). The AfDB defines inclusive growth as *economic growth that results in a wider access to sustainable socio-economic opportunities for a broader number of people, regions or countries, while protecting the vulnerable, all being done in an environment of fairness, equal justice, and political plurality* ([28] p.2). In adopting such a definition, the AfDB comes close to the World Bank definition. However, it recognises the limitations of the pro-poor growth approach and proposes interventions that target all segments of the economy and society for inclusive growth.

The AfDB's inclusive growth strategy rests on four pillars[6] which are economic, social, spatial and political inclusions [29]. Based on these, an index of inclusive growth from the perspective of the AfDB has been developed, accounting for inequality in economic growth by the use of the inequality-adjusted GDP per capita. A number of other arguments have also been included in the index such as economic diversification, health, education, infrastructure, gender and governance, to capture the other pillars [30].

2.5. The UNDP Approach

The approach of UNDP is concisely captured in Kjøller-Hansen and Sperling [31], characterised by participation and benefit-sharing, with particular emphasis on employment. Growth is inclusive if it: happens in sectors that employ the poor such as agriculture; occurs in regions where the poor live such as rural and relatively backward regions; employs production factors such as unskilled labour which the poor possess in abundance and results in reducing prices of commodities which the poor consume such as food, fuel, clothing and public transport. As such, increasing return to labour would be characterised as a pro-poor process. On this point, the UNDP approach is closest to that of the World Bank in that increasing labour returns in a non-contracting economy would happen by means of increasing employment and increasing productivity of those employed. Indeed, UNDP [32] recognises this process as being a result of technological and institutional changes that brings about, not only low-skill absorbing opportunities, but increased productivity of the poor. This focus on the poor is highlighted as follows: *An improvement in the fraction of bottom half of the population in the mainstream band would indicate inclusion in the mainstream economic activity and vice versa* ((24) p. 6). This is a notion that embraces the facet of relative pro-poor growth.

2.6. Other contributions

A number of independent contributions to develop a framework for inclusive growth measurement and analyses have been undertaken by other authors. Anand et al. [34] propose a measure of inclusive growth based on the concept of social mobility. Their definition of the social mobility function is the generalized concentration curve based on Ali and Son [35]. The arguments of the social mobility function are growth rates and income distribution[7], which allows them to evaluate movements upwards and downward the functions over time to depict inclusivity. Also following the concentration curve approach of Ali and Son [35], Adedeji et al. [36] rather specify a social opportunity function such that the slope of the function determines whether the social opportunities are inclusive or exclusive. The notion remains the same with Anand et al. [34] except that their application is limited to levels and equities of health and education, while Anand et al. [34] use average income and its distribution.

McKinley [37] in the ADB tradition proposes an index of inclusive growth by applying weights to a myriad of factors that may underpin growth and inclusion, such as growth itself, productive

[6] Informed by these, the AfDB sets out five operational priorities to guide its strategy for inclusive growth in Africa: infrastructure development, regional economic integration, private sector development, governance and accountability, and skills and technology [41] [19],

[7] Taking $\bar{y}_i$ as the mean income of the bottom i% of the population, the inclusive growth index of [34] $\bar{y}^*$is the area under the social mobility curve, following Ali and Son [35] who propose an equity index $\omega = \frac{\bar{y}^*}{\bar{y}}$, change in inclusive growth can be as a result of equity changes, change in average or per capita income, or both: $d\bar{y}^* = \omega . d\bar{y} + d\omega . \bar{y}$

employment, economic infrastructure, poverty, equity (including gender), human capabilities and social protection. Such an index with arbitrary weights can be difficult to implement in practice due to data requirements, interpretation and practical policy implication issues. Ramos et al. [38] produce a framework for inclusive growth measurement based on two dimensions: benefit sharing and participation, captured by poverty rates, inequality and the inverse of employment to population ratio. Their index ranges from 0 to 1 and is built through the min-max normalization approach for data on the three variables.

Kjøller-Hansen and Sperling [31] propose a set of five criteria, corresponding to five different indicators to be collectively applied in inclusive growth assessment. The criteria relate to whether: the employment-to-working age population levels have risen; wage growth has been equal to or higher than overall economic growth; growth of low-wage sector wages are higher or equal to the growth rate of wages in high-wage sectors; employment shares are shifting from low-wage sectors to high-wage sectors; and whether there is labour productivity growth flowing from structural transformation.

Apart from the ADB approach [26], environmental considerations are very marginal in most inclusive growth conceptualisations. Stuart [12] documents cases where standard inclusive growth policies appear to have yielded fruits in terms of lifting many from poverty. However, at the same time, because environmental factors were not accounted for, the population that depended directly on environmental and ecosystem services became worse-off. The conceptual link between inclusive growth and environmental sustainability can be traced within the thinking along the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC). This links levels of income to quality of the environment [39]. In an attempt to explore other possible variables that may affect the EKC process, Bimonte [40] investigates whether a more participatory[8] development process (with embedded notion of inclusivity) would lead to an increasing demand for a higher environmental quality. He concludes that through higher environmental quality in the future, more participative or inclusive growth would bring about more sustainable environment. Such thinking has to be developed and brought to the centre of most inclusive growth conceptualisations in order not to leave some ecosystem-dependent ethnic minorities in the pursuit of inclusive growth.

3. Empirical evidence of inclusive growth in Africa

The empirical evidence of inclusivity of economic growth in Africa is briefly reviewed below according to the different conceptualizations and measurement attempts explored above. The summary of the different authors, key indicators, countries and results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: **Summary of inclusive economic growth concepts and measurement approaches**

Approach [Authors]	**Key indicators/main framework**	**Countries**	**Results**
WB: [21]	Growth diagnostic approach with individual income or welfare as a function of a vector of their price-weighted factor shares	Zambia	negative

[8] He captures a more participative process in terms of higher levels of literacy, information access and equality (or less inequality).

AfDB: [19]; [41]; [28]; [29]; [30]	Composite index of: Inequality-adjusted GDP per capita; Governance indicator; Economic diversification; Infrastructure Index; Health[9]; Education[10]; Women participation in the labour market[11]; Employment elasticity of growth	46 countries	Egypt, Botswana, Mauritius, Tunisia, Algeria,	Top five performers
			Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Niger	Bottom five performers
UNDP: [32];[33]; [38]; [12]	(0-1) index based on benefit sharing (captured by inequality and poverty) and participation (captured by the inverse of employment to population ratio)	Inequality	Ethiopia, Zambia,	positive
			South Africa	negative
		Poverty	Uganda, Ethiopia	positive
			Kenya, Madagascar, Zambia	negative
		employment	South Africa, Tunisia,	positive
		Overall and for Africa		negative
Others: [35]; [42]; [43]; [31]	Movement up the social welfare/opportunity function	29 countries	Mozambique, Namibia, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Tanzania and Zambia	positive
			Ghana, Seychelles, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire Zambia and Madagascar	negative

Source: Author's compilation

4. Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the key concepts of inclusive economic growth and additional contributions made to develop frameworks for its measurement with particular relevance to Africa. The key messages is that there is still room for more conceptual elaboration to produce a tenable but inclusive and unified framework for the proper analyses of inclusive economic growth within African economies. The link of inclusive growth to environmental sustainability, though suggested in this literature review, has to be more closely explored to make it more explicit. The domain of inclusive growth therefore still remains a field with great potentials for research that may carry promises for more equitable, just societies and sustainable use of resources in the future. Emerging empirical evidence for Africa shows a mixed bag of effects. This suggests that overall Africa is still a long way away from imagining and achieving a significant level of inclusivity of its growth.

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[9] Index of Infant mortality, Life expectancy, Business impact of malaria, Malaria incidence, Business impact of tuberculosis , Tuberculosis incidence , Business impact of HIV/AIDS , HIV prevalence,

[10] Index of Secondary and Tertiary enrolments, quality of the educational system, quality of math and science Education, quality of management schools, Internet access in schools , Local availability of research and training services and Extent of staff training,

[11] Proportion of the women ages 15 and older that is economically active in the period.

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